



# INFLUENCE OF BIG-FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS ON PERCEIVED ACADEMIC STRESS AND COPING STYLES AMONG EMERGING ADULTS

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## ABSTRACT

*Emerging adults may face a lot of stress while trying to maintain their academics in college. The methods they choose to cope with academic stress may vary and can depend upon their personality traits. Recent studies on personality, stress and coping were reviewed and further research on this topic was necessary. This study examined the relation between the big-five personality traits, perceived academic stress, and the coping mechanisms used by emerging adults. The data collected from 203 college students through snowball sampling technique was analyzed using a correlational research design. We found that the personality traits of emerging adults had a high influence on the perceived academic stress and the coping style they adopt to handle the stress. At last, suggestions based on the findings were discussed.*

**KEYWORDS:** Academic Workload, Coping, Big-five Personality Traits, Education

## INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood is a period of transition from adolescence to young adulthood, where students mature and start preparing for their careers. This is the time when students engage in understanding the realities of life in a better way rather than how they did it previously. Emerging adults studying in colleges may face a lot of stress while trying to maintain their academics. Academic workloads were found to be a significant predictor of stress appraisal (Mahtab & Javed, 2020) which was found to affect the emotional well-being of students (Clabaugh et al., 2021). When under stress, the students in the age group (18 to 25) may not be able to seek professional help due to lack of knowledge of the consequences that academic stress can bring about. As perceived stress influences the life satisfaction of the individuals (Lee et al., 2016), stress can sometimes become a grave reality that can even affect one's career life.

The academic stress experienced by each student and the way by which they respond to each stressor is influenced by the various personality traits they possess (Shokri et al., 2007). As a classroom consists of students with different personality traits, the coping techniques they tend to adopt with each stressor may also be different. Coping techniques refers to the behavioural and cognitive tactics used to deal with stressful situations, conditions, and demands. Early studies found out that personality traits have an influence not only on the academic stress experienced by students but also

on the style they choose to cope with the stress (de la Fuente et al., 2020; Shokri et al., 2007). Understanding the influence of personality on perceived academic stress and coping can help us to formulate intervention methods that can help students to deal with these academic stresses. This, in turn, may help students with different personality traits to reduce their stress levels. Thus the present study tries to find out the relationship between these variables.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A study conducted by Nechita et al. (2015) on university students in Craiova to understand the association of personality with academic performance found that positive and negative correlation exists between factors of personality and academic performance of students. The study concluded that conscientiousness had a positive influence whereas extraversion had a negative influence on the academic achievement of students. Students who scored higher on the neuroticism scale were doing academically better than students who appeared to be less neurotic. No correlation was found between agreeableness and academic performance. Women were found to be more agreeable and emotionally unstable when compared to men. Stress had a positive correlation with neuroticism and openness to experience.

Sukumar & Kanagarathinam (2017) investigated the relationship between personality traits and academic stress and coping techniques adopted by adolescents and revealed that



personality factors had a significant relationship with academic stress. The enhancement of personality traits may help in increasing the capability to manage stress and may lead to better academic performance.

Sivailango et al. (2020) examined the relationship between personality, coping methods, and quality of life among South Indian undergraduate medical students. Males scored more on the extraversion scale and females on the neuroticism scale. Females adopted better coping strategies than males. Extraversion was directly correlated with problem-focused and emotion-focused engagement coping strategy whereas neuroticism had an inverse correlation with emotion-focused disengagement coping strategy.

Sahu & Jha (2020) investigated the relationship among academic stress, personality, locale and gender on tribal and non-tribal school students in Chhattisgarh. Although in non-tribal school students, a positive relation between neuroticism and academic stress was observed, a negative relation between extraversion and academic stress was observed. Academic stress was common among them and had a negative effect on their academic performance.

Aina & Wijayati (2019) studied graduate students from Malang State University to know the relation between academic stress and coping techniques. Student worries were one of the main causes of academic stress. Many concerns may arise if they were not handled correctly by the corresponding authorities. Sometimes academic stress can also make students perform better when compared to situations without stress. Yet the study implied that it was quite important to understand the academic stress of students and the methods they adopt to cope with stressors. Further research to understand the stressors of academic stress and the technique used by students to manage academic stress was suggested.

Chai & Low (2015) studied University students in Malaysia to find the relation among personality, coping mechanisms and psychological stress. The study revealed that the personality factors were associated with the coping strategies used by students and not with the psychological stress experienced by them. There was a significant correlation between psychological stress and coping mechanisms used by the students. Psychological stress levels were positively correlated with avoidant and socially supported coping techniques. The coping strategies used regularly by students are positive reinterpretation, growth, planning, and acceptance based on the coping inventory. Understanding the coping mechanisms used by the students can help in the prediction of the level of psychological stress faced by them. Further research on finding the relationship between personality and level of psychological stress and coping strategies was proposed.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the relationship between personality traits and perceived academic stress among emerging adults
2. To find out the coping styles used by emerging adults in relation to their personality

## HYPOTHESES

1. There is a significant relation between personality traits with perceived academic stress
2. There is a significant relation between personality traits and coping styles

## METHODOLOGY

This study is intended to find the relation between personality, perceived academic stress and coping strategies. 203 college students including both males and females from different states (Karnataka, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Kerala) were asked to complete the questionnaire. The samples were collected using convenience sampling method. The data collection was administered using Google Forms. Pearson bivariate correlation was found using SPSS - 28.0.1.1(14).

The survey was conducted based on the consent taken from the participating students. The students were allowed to complete the survey based on their leisure time. Opportunity for asking any doubts during the survey was provided. The first sheet of the survey was intended to collect socio-demographic details like age and gender. The second, third, and fourth sheets of the survey consisted of questions about their personality, perceived academic stress and coping strategies questionnaires. They were given instructions on how to respond to each statement. The respondents were thanked for their participation after completing the survey. The collected data was analyzed for drawing conclusions based on the aim of the study.

Gosling et al. (2003) had developed a ten-item personality inventory (TIPI), a quick way to examine the big-five personality traits i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience. Each of the five personality traits had two elements on the TIPI. Two desirable descriptors were present in the positive statement, while two undesirable descriptors were present in the negative statement. The ten statements were scored based on a seven-point Likert scale. The TIPI exhibited test-retest reliability of 0.72 after six weeks.

The academic stress of college students was measured using the Perception Academic Stress scale (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). The questionnaire contained 28 items based on four factors which are pressure to perform, workload and examination perceptions, self-perceptions, and time constraints. A five-point Likert scale was employed to score the items. This scale has internal consistency reliability of 0.70.

Lin & Chen (2010) developed stress coping style inventory that was used to evaluate the coping strategies utilized by students while they were stressed. Four components that were included in this scale are active emotional coping, passive emotional coping, active problem coping, and passive problem coping style. It was scored using a five-point Likert scale. This tool had a Cronbach alpha of 0.83.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The collected data was analyzed based on the formulated objective and hypothesis. The scores of big-five



personality traits perceived academic stress, and coping styles were assessed using the Pearson bivariate correlation method. The findings have been presented in the respective tables.

The relationship between personality traits and factors of perceived academic stress is shown in Table 1. The extraversion personality factor was positively and significantly related to pressures to perform ( $r = .248^{**}$ ), workload perceptions ( $r = .153^*$ ), and academic self-perception factors ( $r = .200^{**}$ ). Openness to experience had a positive and significant relation with pressure to perform ( $r = .193^{**}$ ) and academic self-perception ( $r = .261^{**}$ ), whereas agreeableness had a positive and significant relationship with academic self-perception ( $r = .238^{**}$ ). Personality traits which include conscientiousness and emotional stability were found to be positively and significantly correlated with all four components of academic stress, viz. pressure to perform ( $r = .143^*$ ;  $r = .436^{**}$ ), perceptions of workload ( $r = .159^*$ ;  $r = .287^{**}$ ), academic self-perceptions ( $r = .303^{**}$ ;  $r = .499^{**}$ ) and time restraints ( $r = .140^*$ ;  $r = .297^{**}$ ). Thus, an alternative hypothesis that "There is a significant relation between personality traits and perceived academic stress", was accepted in terms of conscientiousness and emotional stability. Agreeableness had a positive but insignificant correlation with pressures to perform, perceptions of workload and time restraints factors of academic stress. Openness to experience traits of personality had a positive and insignificant correlation with two factors of academic stress, viz. perceptions of workload and time restraints.

We can see in Table 2 that extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to experience were negatively and significantly correlated with passive emotional coping strategy ( $r = -.200^{**}$ ;  $r = -.207^{**}$ ;  $r = -.360^{**}$ ;  $r = -.501^{**}$ ;  $r = -.344^{**}$ ) whereas there was a positive significant correlation with active emotional ( $r = .264^{**}$ ;  $r = .160^*$ ;  $r = .150^*$ ;  $r = .392^{**}$ ;  $r = .254^{**}$ ) and active problem coping styles ( $r = .167^*$ ;  $r = .153^*$ ;  $r = .235^{**}$ ;  $r = .316^{**}$ ;  $r = .240^{**}$ ). Agreeableness and conscientiousness was negatively and significantly correlated with passive problem coping style ( $r = -.184^{**}$ ;  $r = -.213^{**}$ ). Extraversion, emotional stability and openness to experience was negatively correlated to passive problem coping but the results were not significant. Thus, an alternative hypothesis that "There is a significant relation between personality traits and coping styles" was accepted in terms of active emotional, passive emotional and active problem coping styles.

As the relation between personality traits, perceived academic stress and coping styles were examined in this study, a positive and significant relationship was found between all personality traits with most factors of perceived academic stress. Extraversion and openness to experience had a significant positive correlation with certain factors of academic stress which was not consistent with the results in the study conducted by Ghoshal & Banerjee (2021), where they found no relationship between extraversion, openness and academic stress. Conscientiousness and emotional stability had a positive relationship with all factors of perceived academic stress which was supported by the research conducted by Meyer Stamp (2016). Openness to experience

seems to be a negative predictor of primary stress appraisal, but conscientiousness was found to be a positive predictor of secondary stress appraisal; extraversion was found to be a negative predictor (Pollak et al., 2020). Agreeableness had a significant correlation with a factor of perceived academic stress which is somewhat consistent with the results of the study conducted by Xin et al. (2017) where they found no significant relation between agreeableness and acute stress response. A positive significant correlation was found between extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness and emotional stability with active emotional and active problem coping styles. All personality traits were having significant negative correlation with passive emotional coping. Agreeableness and conscientiousness were having significant negative correlation with passive problem coping style. Task-oriented coping was positively associated with extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness in a study done by Leszko et al. (2020), but negatively related with neuroticism; extraversion and neuroticism were found to be negatively associated with avoidance coping while neuroticism was found to be positively related to emotion-focused coping mechanism.

There were few limitations to this study which must be taken into consideration while interpreting the results. As self-reported data cannot be precise there is a chance of variation in personality traits, perceived academic stress and coping styles with the actual values. Students may not be ready to report the excessive amounts of stress they were experiencing and mechanisms they use to cope with those stressors. This study analyzed the relation of personality with coping and perceived academic stress. The participants in this study were mostly from different states in India, so there can be an influence of culture and the educational system. Intervention studies based on these findings can help students to cope with stressful situations in a better way.

## SUGGESTIONS

1. As extraverted, conscientious, and emotionally stable individuals were found to have a significant positive correlation with all the factors of perceived academic stress. It is recommended that the entire parent and teaching community must take utmost care in assigning academic tasks to them.
2. Individuals who adopt passive emotional coping styles were found to have a negative correlation with their personality traits whereas active emotional coping styles had a positive correlation with their personality traits. Individuals who face excessive academic stress are suggested to try out active rather than passive coping techniques to deal with it.

## CONCLUSION

After an in-depth study of the relation of personality traits with perceived academic stress and coping styles, it was found that a significant relationship exists between these variables in emerging adults. Personality had an impact on the way by which students perceived the level of academic stress. The coping strategies they adapt to cope with stressful situation was found to be based on the personality traits they



possessed. Hence, there is a need for teachers and health professionals to manage the academic stress of students based on their personality trait which can in turn help them achieve

good academic performances. The improvement in coping strategies can help them in increasing their ability to solve academic problems and handle them well.

**Table 1**

PERCEIVED ACADEMIC STRESS					
PERSONALITY TRAITS		Pressures to Perform	Perceptions of Workload	Academic Self-Perception	Time Restraints
	Extraversion	0.248**	0.153*	0.200**	0.135
	Agreeableness	0.105	0.127	0.238**	0.126
	Conscientiousness	0.143*	0.159*	0.303**	0.140*
	Emotional Stability	0.436**	0.287**	0.499**	0.297**
	Openness to Experience	0.193**	0.130	0.261**	0.092
	**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)				
*Correlation is significant at the the 0.05 level (2-tailed)					

**Table 2**

COPING STYLE					
PERSONALITY TRAITS		Active Emotional	Passive Emotional	Active Problem	Passive Problem
	Extraversion	0.264**	-0.200**	0.167*	-0.028
	Agreeableness	0.160*	-0.207**	0.153*	-0.184**
	Conscientiousness	0.150*	-0.360**	0.235**	-0.213**
	Emotional Stability	0.392**	-0.501**	0.316**	-0.111
	Openness to Experience	0.254**	-0.344**	0.240**	-0.131
	**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)				
*Correlation is significant at the the 0.05 level (2-tailed)					

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